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Six Flags opening thrill ride and show on Saturday

ARLINGTON—The romantic era when explorers and pirates roamed the Lone Star State's Gulf Coast will be celebrated at Six Flags Over Texas with the opening of an all-new Skull Island Saturday.

Major changes have been made to the island located in the center of the theme park with the addition of a whirling new thrill ride called the Spinnaker and a puppet show staged on a 30-foot priate ship.

Skull Island is one of the original sections in the Arlington entertainment center which opened in August, 1961.

On one side of the island is the Spinnaker ride, which gives thrill-seekers a fast whirl parallel to the ground and then revolves them upside down. It is a giant, spoked 51-foot wheel with 21 gondolas attached to the "rim."

Two persons board each gondola and are secured inside before the wheel begins spinning on its side at ever increasing speeds until the gondolas are flung outward and riders find themselves whirling parallel to the ground.

Then a massive hydraulic system tilts the wheel on its rim and riders are revolved upside down. The wheel returns to its original position before slowing and stopping.

On the other side of the island, guests will have the opportunity to watch a one-of-a-kind puppet show called "Captain LaFeet's Flagship Follies." The stage for the show is a replica of a 16th century pirate ship, and it is docked in a lagoon across from the audience seated on Skull Island.

Star of the show is Captain LaFeet, whose feet are as big as his pirate's hat. He leads a crew of wacky, nautical characters, including singing and dancing skeletons, mops, swords, buckets and fruitbaskets. In one scene, there are singing and dancing cannonballs led by a banjo-playing character called Wabash.

Movie star puppets pop in and out of gunports. Even the crow on top of the mast is part of the act.

The show is written and produced by John Hardman, who is also creater and puppeteer for the Argyle the Snake Show presented at the theme park.

Behind the scenes in the pirate puppet show, five puppeteers work hand, string and stick puppets from the hull of the ship.

Six Flags General Manager Dan Howells said, "We are excited about the entertainment package we are opening on Skull Island. The pirate show is totally unique and the Spinnaker is one of the most thrilling rides we've ever offered.

"Out guest surveys idnicate people want more thrill rides at Six Flags. We believe the Spinnaker is the perfect answer to this request.

Also, the Texas Chute Out parachute ride will have some added twists this season. Half of the twelve 'chutes will be attached to standup metal baskets that spin riders as they are hoisted 175 feet straight up and released for a hair-raising trip down. The remainder of the 'chutes will take riders up and down on bench-like seats.

There will be other changes made to the park in this season's $2 million expansion program, including the remodeling of the entrance mall area and many changes in the landscape design.

New shows will premiere at the park theaters, including a modern-day minstral show at the Southern Palace called "Good Times, Good Music, Good Friends!" and a circus-theme show at Good Time Theater called "Big Top Revue."

Sixflags Over Texas has earned the rank of "Granddaddy of regional theme parks" now that it is entering its 17th season. The entertainment center was the first in the nation to combine a historical theme with fun and entertainment.

Th idea proved successful from the beginning with large numbers of persons from around the world visiting the park each season.

In 1976, a record-breaking 2.5 million persons visited the park. Some time early this season, park officials will welcome their 30 millionth guest.

Six Flags is open nine months of the year, operating on weekdays only in the spring and fall and daily from Memorial Day through Labor Day. During Easter vacation, the theme park will be open daily from April 6-17.

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